

Grammar Can Be Fun!

By Angelina Bezrukova

Grammar is always looked upon as a necessary but a very boring part of any foreign language study, and it is especially challenging when teaching children four to five years old. One way to reinforce grammar structures for children is through the use of games and songs. Best of all I like finger games and songs as they can be used both to introduce and drill grammar structures or conversational formulas. In just five minutes you can teach children to use the phrases: "How do you do?", "Where are you?", "Here I am." Following are some suggestions for teaching finger games:

Tell the children that they will learn a song about Tommy Thumb and his friends. Show the children each of the fingers on your hand, and sing a song about each finger. Then ask the children to sing after you, repeating each verse until the children have learned the song. Make sure that everybody learns the words, and pronounces them correctly.

Tommy Thumb, Tommy Thumb,
fingers are clasped in your fists

Where are you?
show your thumb

"Here I am, Here I am.
How do you do?"

Peter Pointer, Peter Pointer,
Where are you?
show your index finger

"Here I am, Here I am.
How do you do?"

Toby Tall, Toby Tall,
Where are you?
Show your middle finger

"Here I am, Here I am
How do you do?"

Ruby Ring, Ruby Ring,
Where are you?
show your ring finger

"Here I am. Here I am.
How do you do?"
Baby small, baby small,

Where are you?
show your little finger

"Here I am. Here I am.
How do you do?"

Since children enjoy variety, here is another activity which reinforces the same *Wh-* question structure: Put several small dolls on a table in the front of your class and ask the children to shut their eyes. Take away one of the dolls and then ask the children to open their eyes so they can see that one of the dolls is missing. The teacher then sings the following song, about the missing doll: "Pretty doll, where are you?" The children respond by singing the question all together. Then one of them answers using the structure "Here I am. How do you do?"

Later I have the children shut their eyes again, and I ask one of them to hide somewhere in the room. When the children open their eyes and see that someone is missing, they sing the song "Where are you?" addressing the missing child who appears and sings the answer "Here I am. How are you?"

The children not only enjoy the song, they also start to use the structures in their speech.

These finger games can be used with university students, but for a different purpose. I think that listening to a lecture is hard work, and the students need some sort of relaxation in the middle of it. Five minutes of a different activity such as finger exercises gives them that opportunity.

The following is another finger game which helps students exercise not only their fingers but their memory as well.

Two Fat Gentlemen
fingers are clasped in fists

Two fat gentlemen met in the lane.
They bowed most politely.
thumb fingers bow

They bowed once again.
"How do you do? How do you do?
How do you do?" again.
Two thin ladies met in the lane.
index fingers bow in turn and then together

They bowed most politely.
They bowed once again.
"How do you do? How do you do? How do you do?" again.
Two tall policemen met in the lane.
middle fingers bow

They bowed most politely.
They bowed once again.
"How do you do? How do you do?
How do you do?" again.
Two little boys (girls) met in the lane.
ring fingers bow

They bowed most politely.
They bowed once again.
"How do you do? How do you do?
How do you do?" again.
Two little babies met in the lane.
little fingers bow

They bowed most politely.
They bowed once again.
"How do you do? How do you do?
How do you do?" again.

This kind of diversity gives students the opportunity to change their activity and relax. In the case of small children they learn grammar without realizing it.

There are many other games and songs which can be used successfully in teaching English as a foreign language to both young children and grown-ups. The following is one which could be useful in teaching grammatical structures, like "Have got.; Have you got?; Yes, I have; No, I don't; What color is.? It is.; Give me the,., please" on topics.

Children (students) sit around a table on which are piled a number of cards on any topic that the children have studied. The teacher begins the game, explaining the procedure by her actions and speech. She takes a card from the pile, looks at it and addresses a doll (or a child who has been prepared): "I've got a bear. Have you got a bear?" The child answers: "No, I don't. Give me the bear, please." "Here you are." "Thank you."

The dialogue continues when the child takes the card and addresses the same question to the child on her/his left. He now has two cards and knows the names of both of them. The child who completes the dialogue can ask for one of the picture cards. The game goes on until the children take all the cards. Each of them has the opportunity to ask and answer the questions. The result of the game is that the children not only learn certain grammatical structures, but also the rules of communication.

The variants of the game may be used when you want to introduce "What" questions: "What have you got? A bear. What color is a bear?" and so on. It may be a "Guessing Game": "Do you have a.? No, I don't/Yes, I do." The variants depend upon the goal of the lesson and the material to be taught.

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